

25th Anniversary

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE LAKE TAHOE SUMMIT  
2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS + LOOKING FORWARD



PHOTO: JARVIS PHOTOGRAPHY



**LAKE TAHOE**  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPROVEMENT  
PROGRAM

August 2021

# *Celebrating 25 Years*

## LAKE TAHOE SUMMIT

**I**n the late 1990s, Lake Tahoe was in trouble. Clarity was declining, urban centers were decaying, and overstocked forests posed a profound fire threat. California's Sen. Dianne Feinstein called it a time of "environmental emergency."

The first Lake Tahoe Summit in 1997 brought President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore to Lake Tahoe. They called for an unparalleled partnership to restore Tahoe's threatened environment and pledged to increase the federal funding for this national treasure. The Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) answered that call. The program lays out the blueprint for Lake Tahoe's climate resilience, outlining the priority projects necessary to reach the region's environmental goals.

The EIP is implemented through a strong collaborative partnership that spans all jurisdictions and government sectors and includes the private business community, the science community, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

Twenty-five years later, EIP partners have invested over \$2.6 billion to complete more than 700 lake-saving projects. These investments are critical to building resiliency in the Tahoe Basin and preparing for new threats posed by climate change and a surge in visitation.

### 1997-2020 EIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**94,182**

boats inspected for  
aquatic invasive species

**108**

acres treated to reduce  
aquatic invasive species

**87,552** acres of forest treated  
to reduce hazardous fuels

**195** miles of bike and pedestrian  
paths constructed or improved

**812** miles of roadway renovated  
to reduce erosion and  
stormwater pollution

**3,195**

linear feet of public  
shoreline added

**20,058**

parcels with erosion  
control BMPs to better  
protect water quality





Lake Tahoe

This landscape-scale collaboration is a partnership between nearly 80 public and private organizations working together since 1997.

## RESILIENT TAHOE: PERSEVERING THROUGH 2020

**B**ecause of Lake Tahoe's unique geographic boundaries, leaders coordinated COVID-19 protocols across two states and five counties. The strong partnership built across the region for decades made Lake Tahoe well-positioned to rise to the challenge and collaborate in new ways. Despite many obstacles, EIP partners achieved significant milestones.

**Visitation Surge:** A new coalition of recreation managers in the basin partnered to solve the unique recreation challenges intensified by high visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Fire Adapted Communities:** The Tahoe Fire Fuels Team achieved the highest number of defensible space inspections ever done in a year—6,481.

**Take Care:** This basin-wide stewardship campaign expanded its reach and pivoted messaging to keep residents and visitors safe during COVID-19. Traffic to the [takecaretahoe.org](https://takecaretahoe.org) website increased over 200%.

**Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:** The Tahoe Region surpassed the initial target of 15 percent GHG emission reduction by 2020. The 2014 Sustainability Action Plan set additional targets of 49 percent by 2035, and net-zero by 2045.

**Tahoe Blue Crew:** Nearly 100 volunteer crews led by the League to Save Lake Tahoe assisted land managers by removing over 6,000 pounds of litter at popular recreation sites.

**24th Annual Lake Tahoe Summit:** The first ever fully virtual August event hosted by U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto engaged a record 1,400 people and focused a national spotlight on the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program.





## WATERSHEDS AND WATER QUALITY

*lake Tahoe*

Lake Tahoe is one of the clearest, largest lakes in the world. Development in the 1960s significantly reduced the lake's clarity by destroying sensitive lands that once acted as filters for sediment and pollution. Partners have invested heavily in environmental improvement projects to reverse that trend. Much work is being done to capture and treat stormwater runoff and to restore important natural filters like meadows and wetlands that also provide critical wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

PHOTO: DRONE PROMOTIONS

### WATERSHEDS AND WATER QUALITY

#### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- Local jurisdictions set a record with 9,875 miles of street sweeping to protect Lake Tahoe from roadway stormwater runoff.
- Placer County and partners restored 750 feet of stream channel, 1.2 acres of wetlands, and retrofitted 2 miles of road with improved stormwater infrastructure in the Lake Forest neighborhood near Tahoe City.
- The City of South Lake Tahoe restored 475 feet of Bijou Creek and adjacent wetland to reduce flooding and improve stormwater treatment.
- Douglas County partnered with the Nevada Tahoe Resource Conservation District to restore Brautovich Park. The project enhanced historic wetland, relocated the existing baseball field and playground to less sensitive land, and upgraded the parking and water quality features.
- The USDA Forest Service removed the Incline Dam and is continuing restoration of the surrounding sensitive wetland and stream area.

#### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Continue exceeding targets in achieving Total Maximum Daily Load reductions of fine sediment and stormwater pollutants.
- Complete priority watershed improvement projects such as the Upper Truckee Marsh.
- Restore native wildlife habitat by removing invasive species and reintroducing historic species such as the Lahontan cutthroat trout.

#### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Improve understanding of climate impact on precipitation, lake clarity, and winter flooding.
- Enhance design standards for stormwater infrastructure to capture increased rain and runoff.

#### PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

##### MECKS MEADOW RESTORATION

The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California continued restoration of Meeks Meadow in partnership with the USDA Forest Service and the California Tahoe Conservancy. In December 2020, Washoe tribal members removed crowded trees from the meadow to help raise the water table and promote the growth of culturally significant plants such as blueberries and willow. These trees were used as Christmas trees for local tribal members and were dropped off at community centers for tribal elders.



PHOTO: WASHOE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT



## AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

Partners are taking determined actions to prevent and control the alarming spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Thanks to the federal Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, all known aquatic weed infestations in the lake are being addressed by the multi-agency partnership.

### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- TRPA and the Lahontan Water Board released the Draft Environmental Analysis for a proposed test of AIS control methods in the Tahoe Keys, the location of the lake's largest infestation. Agencies engaged hundreds of stakeholders in virtual webinars to give feedback on the project proposed by the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association.
- Quickly mobilized control work on a 100-acre invasive weed infestation in Lake Tahoe that has spread outside the Tahoe Keys. This work will continue in 2021 to manage further spread.
- Secured funding from the Nevada Division of State Lands to begin design of the Spooner Summit permanent watercraft inspection station.

### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Continue the collaborative process to develop a science-based solution to controlling the aquatic weed infestation in the Tahoe Keys.
- Develop funding strategies for the AIS Action Agenda through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and other state, local, and private sources.
- Continue to investigate emerging technologies for AIS prevention, control, and monitoring.

### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Develop new strategies to contain the spread of AIS populations as water temperature increases.
- Increase AIS monitoring and rapid response.

## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

### LAKE TAHOE WATERCRAFT INSPECTION PROGRAM

During the 2020 summer season, Lake Tahoe's Watercraft Inspection Program was put to the test in balancing public health and safety protocols with high visitation. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Tahoe Resource Conservation District quickly adapted the program by phasing the opening of boat inspection stations and implementing a brand-new appointment system to maintain social distancing.

The program once again succeeded in preventing the introduction of AIS into Lake Tahoe. Inspectors intercepted 20 boats with invasive mussels onboard, an 80 percent increase from 2019.

The program is a unique model for public-private partnerships, with the states of California and Nevada sharing costs with boaters.



PHOTO: DRONE PROMOTIONS

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THE NUMBER OF NEW AIS DETECTED  
SINCE INSPECTIONS BEGAN IN 2008.



## FOREST HEALTH

*lake Tahoe*

The worst wildfire year on record scorched more than 1 million acres in the Sierra Nevada in 2020, more than double the previous record set in 2018. While Tahoe was spared from a large, destructive blaze, the effects of the wildfire smoke loomed heavy. For the first time ever, the USDA Forest Service closed all National Forests in California during September because of fire risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) continued public education campaigns to teach residents how to prevent as well as prepare for wildfire. Since the 2007 Angora Fire, the TFFT has completed 65,000 acres of treatment to reduce hazardous fuels. These restoration projects improve the vitality of the basin's forests to withstand the increasing threats of drought and other extreme weather events.

PHOTO: D.L. BLISS STATE PARK, DRONE PROMOTIONS

### FOREST HEALTH

#### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- Despite the hardships of implementing field projects in 2020, the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team completed 2,695 acres of fuels reduction treatment.
- EIP partners planned thousands of acres for future treatment, making projects shovel-ready for upcoming seasons.
- TRPA approved key updates to its Code of Ordinances to support implementation of forest health projects.

#### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Increase the scale of projects to keep pace with the threat of destructive wildfires.
- Continue the partnership with Liberty Utilities and Nevada Energy to create powerline resilience corridors.
- Expand the forest restoration workforce to meet restoration targets while driving the local economy.

#### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Better understand climate impacts on forest habitat threatened by insects and disease.
- Develop biomass capabilities to build forest resiliency and generate renewable energy locally.



» THE USDA FOREST SERVICE COMPLETED 663 ACRES OF FOREST THINNING ON THE WEST SHORE IN PRIORITY AREAS AROUND COMMUNITIES. CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS ALSO COMPLETED 36 ACRES OF PRESCRIBED BURNING IN SUGAR PINE STATE PARK. AGENCIES CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER ON PLANNING LAKE TAHOE WEST, A LANDSCAPE-SCALE RESTORATION PROJECT PROMOTING CLIMATE RESILIENCY.

PHOTO: RICH ADAMS, CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS





## LANDSCAPE-SCALE RESTORATION AND COLLABORATION

Science is informing landscape-scale restoration approaches to restoring Lake Tahoe watersheds and forests. These projects span multiple jurisdictions to treat an area holistically, saving time and money and better serving the environment.

PHOTO: DRONE PROMOTIONS

### MEEKS BAY ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Partners took broad public and stakeholder input on options to restore Meeks Creek and lagoons to a functioning ecosystem while improving public access to Meeks Bay. Removal of aquatic invasive species is underway, and the next phase could significantly enhance wetlands and revitalize recreation amenities in an area that is culturally significant to the Washoe people.



PHOTO: MEEKS BAY, JOHN PELTIER

### UPPER TRUCKEE RIVER RESTORATION

The California Tahoe Conservancy broke ground on the restoration of the largest wetland in Lake Tahoe, the Upper Truckee Marsh. This project is one of several Upper Truckee River Watershed projects that span multiple jurisdictions along the river corridor that will restore the native floodplain, enrich native fish and bird habitat, and improve Lake Tahoe's water quality.



PHOTO: UPPER TRUCKEE RIVER, CALIFORNIA TAHOE CONSERVANCY

### STATE ROUTE 28 CORRIDOR PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This plan takes a comprehensive look at improving water quality and recreation amenities along this popular highway and recreation destination. The first phase of the project included constructing a 3-mile multi-use path that provides a critical transportation link between Incline Village and Sand Harbor State Park. Environmental review of the next 8-mile segment is now complete, which will continue the multi-use path, improve parking, and construct a permanent aquatic invasive species inspection station.



PHOTO: STATE ROUTE 28, SAND HARBOR, DRONE PROMOTIONS





## TRANSPORTATION AND SUSTAINABLE RECREATION

*lake tahoe*

Lake Tahoe's \$5 billion recreation-based economy and sustainable future depend upon an effective, interconnected transportation system. In 2020, both California and Nevada Executive Orders called for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. To achieve the bi-state emission reduction targets, Tahoe's transportation system needs a transformation. Partners are working on strategic investments in transit, multi-use paths, and parking management to meet visitor, resident, and commuter demand while protecting Tahoe's unique natural resources.

PHOTO: EMERALD BAY PARKING, NOVUS SELECT

### TRANSPORTATION

#### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- Both transit systems in the Lake Tahoe Basin became free-to-user to boost ridership.
- The TRPA Governing Board adopted the State Route 89 Corridor Management Plan which outlines the projects needed to improve the visitor experience, reduce traffic congestion, and preserve the environment from South Lake Tahoe to Tahoma.
- Placer County completed the "Resort Triangle" transportation plan. Connecting Interstate 80 and North Lake Tahoe communities, the plan identifies strategies to address traffic congestion, reduce environmental impacts, and enhance transit services and non-motorized travel choices.

#### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Complete critical segments of the multi-use Tahoe Trail around the lake.
- Fund and implement priority projects identified by the Bi-State Transportation Consultation Committee.
- Develop sustainable funding strategies to implement the newly updated Regional Transportation Plan.

#### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Harden transportation network to withstand flooding and landslides.
- Develop evacuation and emergency response plans for the region.

#### PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

##### FANNY BRIDGE COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Tahoe City is a gateway into the Lake Tahoe Basin, often creating a chokepoint for traffic during peak visitation periods. In 2020, the Tahoe Transportation District partnered with Placer County and the Federal Highway Administration to create a new bypass route around Tahoe City. This project included construction of a new bridge over the Truckee River and two new traffic roundabouts to ease congestion. The second phase of the project will include replacing the aging Fanny Bridge and providing new bike and pedestrian features to make a more walkable, bikeable community.



PHOTO: NEW TRUCKEE RIVER BRIDGE, FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION



## SUSTAINABLE RECREATION

The Lake Tahoe Basin is experiencing extraordinary visitation — including crowded trailheads, frustrated residents, new patterns of visitor use, and strained resources. The need for a more sustainable recreation and tourism future for Tahoe has never been more evident.

In response, dozens of partners are collaborating to develop a Tahoe-Truckee Sustainable Recreation Council, which envisions the future of the basin as both a world-class recreation destination and a global leader in environmental stewardship. This group regularly convened over 200 stakeholders to manage the COVID-19 response and surging visitation.



## 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- Both California State Parks and Nevada State Parks successfully kept all parks in the Lake Tahoe Basin open for public access with unprecedented recreation levels while implementing COVID-19 protocols to maintain services and safety.
- The Take Care campaign helped influence behavior with social media, over 3,000 bilingual yard signs, six digital billboards, and sled litter campaigns.
- Unlocked over \$250,000 in funding for Take Care messaging, litter abatement, and parking management.

## FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Address regional recreation challenges through development of a sustainable recreation strategy and Trails Master Plan.
- Implement ambassador programs at recreation hot spots that help convey important stewardship messaging through direct, one-on-one interaction with users.

## BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Implement targeted solutions to curb regional emissions specific to tourism and outdoor recreation.
- Prioritize the importance of equity and climate justice, including engaging tribal, low-income, and minority communities.

PHOTO BY LAURA WHITNEY, LWHITNEYPHOTOS@GMAIL.COM





## SCIENCE, STEWARDSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*lake tahoe*

Lake Tahoe faces an uncertain future with the effects of climate change. Investing in science and research to understand changing lake dynamics and the basin's ecosystem response to extreme weather is critical. The Tahoe Science Advisory Council, comprised of researchers specializing in many disciplines including alpine watersheds and lake ecology, work hand in hand with land managers to drive new research and adaptive management.

PHOTO: TRPA BOAT IN EMERALD BAY, DRONE PROMOTIONS

### SCIENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

#### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- The Tahoe Science Advisory Council developed new Science to Action Plans to explore the linkages between the lake and upland watersheds and track changes to the region's rich biodiversity.

#### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Utilize Science to Action Plans to drive science and research projects and fill critical knowledge gaps.
- Engage scientists in increasing the data set of visitation and recreation use patterns in the basin to help drive solutions to visitor management and tourism.

### STEWARDSHIP

Cultivating environmental stewards, both virtually and in person, is imperative to caring for Lake Tahoe and improving peoples' experiences. Today, EIP partners strive to speak with one voice, engage the community in citizen-science, involve the public in collaborative decision making, and provide full transparency on how EIP investments are made. In short, we are educating visitors and residents about how to Take Care of Tahoe.

#### 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS »

- A new non-profit organization formed by local community members, "Clean Up the Lake," kicked off an underwater scuba trash cleanup of Lake Tahoe. Dive teams removed 1,758 pounds of trash from Nevada's most popular shorelines of Lake Tahoe.

### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY »

- Use science-driven planning tools that account for the interdependence of ecological and social systems.
- Use new three-dimensional modeling tools to better predict how the lake will respond to the evolving climate.



TAHOE CENTRAL SIERRA INITIATIVE

- The Tahoe Institute of Natural Sciences engaged over 100 volunteers from around the basin to participate in their annual bird counts.
- The League to Save Lake Tahoe's "Eyes on the Lake" program held aquatic invasive species identification training at 13 marinas as well as 10 virtual trainings for the public.

#### FUTURE PRIORITIES »

- Promote new information technology such as the Tahoe Boating App and Tahoe Citizen Science App.
- Partner with local visitors authorities to increase awareness of the Lake Tahoe Travel Responsibility Pledge.



## - LOOKING FORWARD -

Tremendous progress has been made to restore Lake Tahoe since President Clinton's visit in 1997 for the first Lake Tahoe Summit. However, climate change is magnifying the threats facing Lake Tahoe, including warming lake temperatures, expanding invasive species infestations, and more dangerous wildfires. The Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) partnership must continue to work diligently to protect this national treasure for future generations.

### LAKE TAHOE RESTORATION ACT

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act (LTRA) has served as the cornerstone for the federal funding share of the EIP since the original law passed in 2000. Since LTRA was reauthorized in 2016, \$53 million has been directed to the basin and the congressional delegation is actively working to reauthorize the Act.

### ACTION PRIORITIES

- Reauthorize the 2016 Lake Tahoe Restoration Act (expires 2023) and appropriate funding to maintain federal support of the EIP.
- Secure sustainable funding commitments for implementation of the Forest Action Plan, the AIS Action Agenda, and the Regional Transportation Plan.
- Continue to strengthen the EIP collaborative partnership by working with all sectors to align priorities, collaboratively develop multi-jurisdictional projects, and increase the pace and scale of restoration basin wide.

### THE EIP TRACKER

[WWW.EIP.LAKETAHOEINFO.ORG](http://WWW.EIP.LAKETAHOEINFO.ORG)

HOSTS INFORMATION  
ONLINE

### EIP ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

In 2020, EIP partners completed an analysis to quantify the impact of the EIP on the region's economy.



### ECONOMIC FINDINGS

**\$2.6 billion**  
in EIP direct investment  
since 1997

**\$5.2 billion**  
in total economic output  
to the region since 1997

The EIP supports  
an average of  
**1,700 jobs**  
a year.

**\$1 million** in EIP  
spending generates  
**\$1.6 million**  
in total economic output.



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## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

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A Blueprint for Climate Resilience